

Flint Hills North Pole Refinery Preliminary Assessment Questions and Answers  
August 2, 2012

- What is a Preliminary Assessment and why did EPA conduct one at this site?

A Preliminary Assessment is the first step in EPA's Superfund process and is designed to identify sites that pose little or no threat to human health and the environment, or if a site does pose a threat, to determine whether the threat requires further investigation and response under the Superfund program. Existing reports and documents are collected and reviewed to determine whether a site threatens human health or the environment. The Preliminary Assessment helps to identify hazardous substances at the site, and the populations and sensitive environments likely to be affected by the release of those substances.

Any person may petition EPA to perform a Preliminary Assessment of a release when the person is, or may be, affected by a release of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Alaska Community Action on Toxics petitioned EPA to conduct a Preliminary Assessment at the Flint Hills North Pole Refinery site.

- What are the Preliminary Assessment findings? Did it uncover anything new?

EPA is still evaluating the information contained within the Preliminary Assessment report. Because the assessment is the collection and review of existing reports and documents, no new information was uncovered.

- What are the next steps after the Preliminary Assessment? Will the site become a Superfund site?

The next step is for EPA to evaluate the information gathered and summarized in the Preliminary Assessment report, then determine if the site threatens human health and the environment and needs additional response under the Superfund program.

If the site warrants additional response under the Superfund program, one option is proposal of the site to EPA's National Priorities List for investigation and remediation. There are other options for investigating and remediating sites, and EPA will determine the best method for addressing this site.

- Does this Preliminary Assessment impact the investigation being done by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation?

No, the Preliminary Assessment will not impact the current investigation by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

- How does EPA determine whether a site should be a Superfund site?

EPA uses the Hazard Ranking System to determine whether a site is eligible for the Superfund National Priorities List. EPA takes information from the Preliminary Assessment and uses the Hazard Ranking System to rank sites according to their potential risks to human health and the environment. This ranking is a screening mechanism for determining which sites may need an additional comprehensive study. It does not determine if cleanup is possible or worthwhile, or the amount of cleanup needed. Instead, it provides a measure of likelihood that people or the environment will be harmed by hazardous substances either on site or leaving the site via air, soil, groundwater, or surface water.

- Can EPA pay for cleanup or do studies to better understand the risks to human health from the contaminant sulfolane, which has been found at the site?

Under the Superfund program, EPA cannot fund non-emergency cleanups or conduct risk assessments unless a site is placed on the National Priorities List.